

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Currently, Thailand's textiles rank 21st and Thailand's garments rank 17th of the world's market share (Thailand Textile Institute). Thailand's textile and garment exports Jan - Oct' 2007 valued US\$2,984.80 and US\$2,807.60 respectively. Thailand export value of both textiles and garments in 2007, US\$ 5,792.4 million (Thailand Textile Institute), grew by 2.35% when compared with the same period value in 2006 (Thailand Textile Institute). Garment Exports by themselves rank 13th of Thailand exports 2007 (Ministry of Commerce and Thailand Textile Institute). The two major markets are USA and EU holding 47% of total exported value. This shows that people who are involved in the international textile and garment export business sector must have good English knowledge and skill so that they can communicate well in English with these two main markets.

Merchandisers in garment manufacturers and export agent companies are key people to communicate with customers in worldwide markets. If merchandisers can communicate in English very well, they will pass correct information to their production department so that the production people can produce garments exactly as the foreign customers want. This will satisfy all parties, especially the customers, who will come back to continue business with those manufacturers and agent companies. On the contrary, if merchandisers have such poor English that sometimes they pass wrong information to production departments and the production people produce the garments with that wrong information, the final products will come out differently from the customers' given detail. This mistake will not only cause big losses to all parties but also cause dissatisfaction for both merchandisers and the garment companies. Generally speaking, people with good English qualifications working in the international textile and garment business lead companies to organizational success and create a good impression, and this may bring garment business growth to Thailand.

It is necessary that merchandisers of international textile and apparel businesses should have formal training of both textile & clothing knowledge and English communication skills. In Hong Kong, there are some textile and clothing institutes with training in both technical and English knowledge; for example, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Polytechnic U) and Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE). The Polytechnic U provides Bachelor's Degree with textiles and garment knowledge, and also two courses of English communication for graduates under the Institute of Textiles and Clothing (ITC), Faculty of Applied Science and Textiles, in The Polytechnic U. In addition, there is a famous English club in Polytechnic U called Big Mouth Corner offering opportunity for students to practice English communication. The IVE, a group of the Kwun Tong Technical College and seven technical Institutes, provides Diploma and Bachelor's Degree in Clothing Merchandising for the graduates. There is no outstanding evidence to show that there are any special activities promoting English communication skill in IVE apart from the compulsory English courses. However, English courses in Polytechnic U and IVE are just fundamental courses. As Hey's research (as cited in So-mui and Mead 2000, p. 5), declares that there are English communication demands on merchandisers graduated from Polytechnic U and IVE when they get into the real business. This proves that even though the Hong Kong merchandisers got some English training while studying, they still need extra English courses, as Business English in the real world is different and more complicated than what they learned from the university or institute. Hey asserts that a merchandiser requires considerable business English communication skills in addition to merchandising specialized knowledge.

In Thailand, there are at least five institutes that supply textiles or fashion & design courses, which are as follows:

1. Bangkok University: The University provides a Bachelor Degree under the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Fashion and Textile Design Department. The course is mainly on fashion & design, and some technical knowledge of color theory, and print & dyeing processes. English is an elective subject.

2. Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep: The University provides a Bachelor Degree under the Faculty of Textile Industries. There are two

majors: Fashion Design and Textile Chemical Engineer. English is not a compulsory subject.

3. Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon: The University provides a Bachelor Degree under the Faculty of Industrial Textiles and Fashion Design. There are four majors: 1) Fashion and Textile Design; 2) Textile Chemical Technology; 3) Textile Product Design; 4) Garment Technology. English is an elective subject.

4. Accademia Italiana International Fashion and Design Institute (Head Office is in Italy): The Institute provides Bachelor degree, Diploma and Certificate. The courses are all theoretical and practical aspects for fashion designer profession. All courses are provided in English.

5. Raffles Design Institute (Head Office is in Australia): The Institute provides a Bachelor Degree. The courses are about garment composition, fashion design and fashion marketing & management. The study is via English language.

Although merchandisers who graduated from Bangkok University, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, and Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon have background knowledge in textiles and clothes, they have very little knowledge in English for communication since the universities do not promote English as core subjects for the course. On the contrary, the courses from Accademia Italiana International Fashion and Design Institute and Raffles Design Institute are provided in English, but they are mainly about fashion design for designers and not textiles and garment knowledge for merchandisers.

At William Connor, one of worldwide buying agent company, and Vision Garment, a Thai garment manufacturer, there are a number of merchandisers functioning as key people negotiating and corresponding with foreign customers, distant fabric suppliers and other concerned parties. The merchandisers have to follow through from placing orders to shipment, and deal with all issues and problems related to the customer requirements and orders. As English communication must be used in the workplace everyday, there might be some needs, problems and wants concerning English communication for the garment merchandisers. This study is to acquire answers to this suspicion.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.2.1 To what extent is English skill required by the management people at William Connor and Vision Garment?

1.2.2 What are major problems concerning English communication of garment merchandisers at William Connor and Vision Garment?

1.2.3 To what extent do the garment merchandisers require English skill at William Connor and Vision garment?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study consists of three main objectives as follows:

1.3.1 To investigate the needs of the garment merchandisers in English communication at PC Garments and Vision Garment.

1.3.2 To define the problems concerning English communication of garment merchandisers at PC Garments and Vision Garment.

1.3.3 To investigate the wants of the garment merchandisers in English communication at PC Garments and Vision Garment.

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Definitions of terms of this study are the following:

Analysis: refers to the study done in order to figure out needs, problems, and wants of garment merchandisers in English communication by interviewing garment merchandisers and their management people.

Garment Merchandisers: refers to garment merchandisers from William Connor and Vision Garment.

Needs: refers to the skills, knowledge and abilities requirement for English communication that garment merchandisers (in the view of management people) need to know in order to function effectively

Problems: refers to difficulties in English communication faced by garment merchandisers.

Wants: refers to garment merchandisers' view of the skills and knowledge they need to know for English communication, on the basis of data relevant to their environment and personal requirements.

English Communication: refers to English knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, for oral and written communication with customers and management people.

William Connor: refers to William E. Connor (Thailand) Ltd.

Vision Garment: refers to Vision Garment Co., Ltd.

ESP: refers to English for Specific Purposes.

BOM: refers to Bill of Material which consists of all details the customers request to produce a garment.

Customers: refers to foreign customers.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 The study was conducted during December 2007 to April 2008, at William Connor and Vision Garment.

1.5.2 The population was three garment merchandisers and one management person at William Connor, and two merchandisers and one management person at Vision Garment.

1.5.3 This study assumed that the population honestly answered the interview according to their experience in using English during work.

1.5.4 The study, however, did not go beyond the analysis of needs, problems and wants of garment merchandisers at William Connor and Vision Garment, such as setting up a syllabus.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study was considered important for the following reasons:

1.6.1 The result of the study could be a guideline in designing a syllabus for garment merchandisers at William Connor and Vision Garment.

1.6.2 The needs, problems, and wants of garment merchandisers disclosed from the study could be a tool for the management people to set an appropriate English course to enhance functional effectiveness in work.

1.6.3 The researcher may apply the result of the study for English communication teaching in other garment companies in the future.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the study with its rationale, objectives, scopes and significance. Then the second chapter reviews the literature and research studies relevant to this study. The third chapter describes the employed method of the study. The fourth chapter presents the obtained data and its findings. Lastly, the fifth chapter contains the conclusions, discussions and recommendations of the study.